

**Testimony before the National Commission on Military, National, and Public Service  
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**National Service Hearing: Creating More National Service Opportunities**

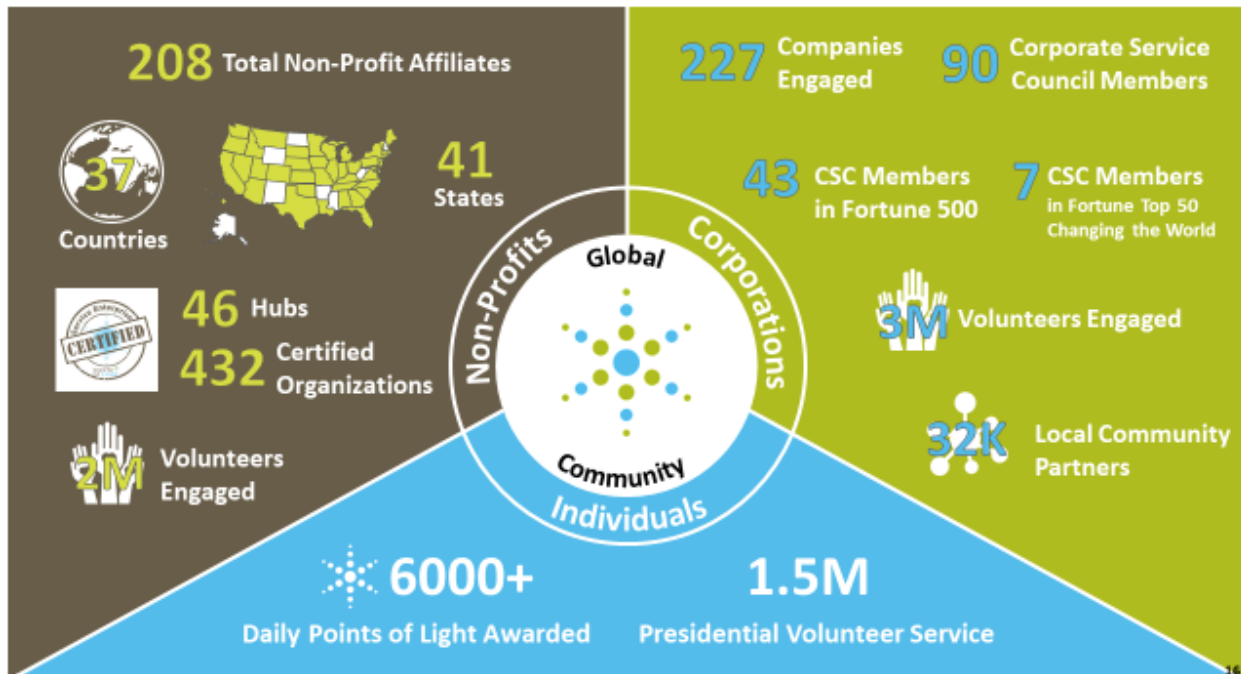
**The Importance of Innovation in the Expansion of National Service**

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**Outline:**

- The Power of Private Sector Partnerships
- Private Sector Pathways to National Service
- A New Spectrum of Service
- Asking a New Question

**Points of Light: Who We Are**



Dear Chairman Heck and members of the Commission:

Thank you for this opportunity to offer my thoughts on behalf of our network to address the scope of national service and the importance of innovation in its expansion. Points of Light is the largest organization dedicated to volunteer service; our mission is to inspire, equip and mobilize individuals to take action that changes the world. We are excited to partner with the Commission on ideas for expanding national service.

While I know you are considering a variety of factors and issues, it is my opinion that it is not a matter of making national service mandatory, but making it relevant.

Up and coming generations, especially digital-first Generation Z, expect a continuum of options to engage, from traditional opportunities at nonprofits to using their time and talent to advocate for a cause. According to the Corporation for National and Community Service Volunteering in America report, 24.9% of Americans say they volunteer with a traditional nonprofit, while 62.5% say they help or are involved in other ways. The UN State of the World Volunteerism report echoes these findings, with 30% of people saying they volunteer at a nonprofit and 70% saying they help in other ways.

Points of Light believes that national service is the backbone of the nonprofit sector. It drives a lifelong passion for service, it directly impacts communities, and it shows how we can both utilize and further develop skilled employees and volunteers. Fifty-six percent of nonprofits indicated more than 75 percent of their workforce comes from volunteers<sup>1</sup>. In many cases, these valuable volunteer resources would not be possible without national service members. AmeriCorps has a rich and successful history of being a force of the nation's volunteers, providing local nonprofits with the critical management leverage needed to unlock the power of their community volunteers.

In our own network, dozens of our Points of Light Network affiliates and their community partners have benefited from the investment our country has made in national service. From leveraging skilled volunteers who improve technology infrastructure in grassroots organization, to financial literacy skill building with opportunity youth, AmeriCorps programs have powered critical work that yielded real and meaningful community impact.

AmeriCorps members also help grow service outside themselves. At Habitat for Humanity, each of their AmeriCorps service members has continued to engage more volunteers<sup>2</sup> than non-host sites, expanding their capacity to meet their mission to eradicate substandard housing in communities where they serve. And as natural disasters become more frequent and more intense, AmeriCorps has proven time and time again its critical role in providing the rapid response

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<sup>1</sup> Verified Volunteers. *Volunteer Screening Trends & Best Practices Report: 2018*. 2018.

<https://www.verifiedvolunteers.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/VV-GDE-2018-Report.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Olson, Bradley PhD; Cooper, Daniel, PhD; Viola, Judah, PhD. *2013-2016 External Evaluation for Habitat for Humanity National Service Program*. 2016.

[https://www.nationalservice.gov/sites/default/files/evidenceexchange/FR\\_HabitatforHumanity\\_Internatl\\_..EvalReport.pdf](https://www.nationalservice.gov/sites/default/files/evidenceexchange/FR_HabitatforHumanity_Internatl_..EvalReport.pdf)

infrastructure that enables other generous natural outpouring of America's citizens to volunteer to safely and productively in the recovery.

We can also agree on the positive impact service has on the people who participate. Seventy-five percent of U.S. adults who volunteer report that volunteering has made them feel physically healthier, and 79 percent report that volunteering lowers their levels of stress. In addition to physical improvements, 94 percent of volunteers report an enriched sense of purpose.<sup>3</sup> My colleagues on the panel can speak to this further, but anyone that has met an active national service member or an alum knows that transformation and growth into full civic citizens is accelerated through national service. An investment in national service is an expression of our national values around service.

However, as traditional service changes, we believe that it is necessary to create a civic society where it is easy for every individual to make a difference and lead. This means we must make service relevant so that every citizen sees it as a needed step to a meaningful civic life.

### **The Power of Private Sector Partnerships**

The government has done an incredible job investing in national service. Congress' continued support of the Corporation for National and Community Service shows that this investment is valued. So how do we continue to invest further and make it even greater? We believe that answer lies in deepening partnerships with the private sector.

The 2019 Edelman Trust Barometer shows that 76 percent of people surveyed say CEOs should take the lead on change – an 11-point increase in the last year. And 73 percent agreed that a company can take specific actions that both increase profits and improve the economic and social conditions in the communities where it operates. Increasingly, the report shows, trust is shifting locally, as people report they hold more trust in their employer than any single institution – with trust levels at 75 percent globally.

As trust in the private sector continues to increase, that creates an opportunity for the government to utilize public private partnerships to make service more relevant and accessible.

Recognizing the transformational role that business can play in service, in 2018 Points of Light and Starbucks piloted the Starbucks Service Fellows program. This innovative employer-led service program allowed Starbucks to leverage untapped talent and deploy local resources to lift the community.

Employees worked 20-hours weekly at a Points of Light Network affiliate nonprofit, and the rest of the time at their local Starbucks. In the six-month pilot, 36 Fellows in 13 markets across the United States collectively provided more than 17,000 hours of community service. We believe in the power of programs like this to redefine the private sector's ability to support civic

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<sup>3</sup> UnitedHealth Group. 2017 *Doing Good is Good for You Study*. 2017.  
[https://www.unitedhealthgroup.com/content/dam/UHG/PDF/2017/2017\\_Study-Doing-Good-is-Good-for-You.pdf](https://www.unitedhealthgroup.com/content/dam/UHG/PDF/2017/2017_Study-Doing-Good-is-Good-for-You.pdf)

engagement. This year, we already have more demand than can be filled for the next round of the program, showing that this level of flexibility and engagement is both wanted and needed.

These types of employer-led programs invite new people to the world of service. We believe everyone has something to give. But if people are not invited to participate, if the barriers to entry are too high, then the 329 million people who are currently not called to serve<sup>4</sup> will remain largely unable and unwilling to do so. Programs like the Starbucks Service Fellows makes it easy for people who cannot give up a year of their lives to still use their considerable skills to support and give back to nonprofits.

And in return, these individuals build skills through these programs that can have large impact on the future of themselves and both sectors. We all know that volunteering is a key way to learn new skills, be exposed to new opportunities, and inspire growth in careers. One Starbucks Service Fellow in Atlanta went through the program while working more than 20 hours at her local Starbucks and going to school. Despite balancing her fulfilment of the program, working full time and going to school, Julie was thrilled by the experience, saying “I uncovered new skills, I gained courage and confidence, and I’m a better partner for Starbucks.” But perhaps most importantly, Julie is now considering pursuing a career in the nonprofit sector.

### **Private Sector Pathways to National Service**

There are opportunities for the nonprofit and government sector to develop more creative ways to embrace the expertise and resources of the private sector to deploy the human capital of America to address the nation’s most pressing challenges. Some examples include:

- **Apprenticeship-to-Career:** As alternatives or supplements to traditional higher education degree programs, businesses could create intern- or apprenticeship-to-hire programs that include some portion of time devoted to public service over a sustained period of time—one to two years.
- **Entrepreneur Corps:** Work with the growing innovation and incubator community, through which start-ups receive business planning support and mentorship to develop social enterprise ventures that could qualify for national service placements, including, potentially for the founding teams of entrepreneurs.
- **Loaned Executive Models:** During periods of corporate restructuring or for skill-building retention/retraining purposes, create national infrastructure and networks for deploying talent in temporary yet intensive project-based assignments, perhaps in team formats.
- **Business Tax Credits for Dedicated Service:** Leverage possible tax incentives for employers who assign and support their talent in qualified national service positions with community organizations. Similar to efforts championed by Senator Orrin Hatch in 2009, these kinds of incentives will leverage skill-based volunteering by trained, private sector professionals to address national priorities.

While our work with Starbucks and their program model is innovative, Starbucks is not the first company to use employee volunteerism as a way to support the community and drive

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<sup>4</sup> National Service Staff Memo 2019

engagement. Each year, Points of Light recognizes the 50 most community-minded companies through its national recognition program, The Civic 50. This initiative honors and awards organizations with over \$1 billion in operating revenue who are leading in corporate social responsibility, and also provides a way to benchmark trends and share best practices with others. In 2018, The Civic 50 honorees companies' employees volunteered 13.3 million hours of time. 28% of volunteer hours were skills-based volunteering.<sup>5</sup>

Corporate recognition programs truly incentivize and set a standard for corporate social good and are another way to inspire other private sector partners to get involved. This could be further utilized for innovative public-private partnerships.

### **A New Spectrum of Service**

More so than anything, the digital age and next generation are influencing the ways we think about engagement. The digital age has made us more connected than ever before. It has opened people's eyes to important causes, more opportunities to engage and more ways to lead and lend support to causes they care about.

We used to live in a world that put people in two categories – those who could get involved and those who could not, or the givers and the receivers. Now there are more opportunities than ever for people of all walks of life to access information, get involved and be an advocate.

The idea of service is innately good. We can all agree on this. But it is wrapped in old cloth. We need to find new ways to clear a path for engagement. And for the next generation, this engagement starts earlier and earlier.

In 2017, in conjunction with Disney Parks, Points of Light launched the Disney Family Volunteer Rewards Program. This program incentivizes schools and nonprofits to host family volunteer activities by rewarding them with Disney Parks tickets. Not only does this program help expand capacity of local nonprofits, but it gives opportunity to people who may have otherwise not become involved in service. They are now, from a very young age, being exposed to the power of giving back. This seemingly simple action could, in fact, change the course of their lives. And to date, this program has engaged more than 400,000 people in nearly 2 million hours of service.

Our work with Disney is an example of how companies can leverage already available opportunities, excess inventory or customer affinity programs for good and help incentivize behavior.

By doing so, these innovative partners will create new entry points for people to engage, which is critical as the next generations – the first truly digital-first generation – comes into adulthood. How do we meet them where they are, and support them in all the ways they live a civic life that

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<sup>5</sup> Points of Light. *The Civic 50: Setting a New Standard for Community Stewardship*. 2018. [www.civic50.org](http://www.civic50.org)

is aligned with their values? Rethinking service and making it relevant to them will be key to the growth of national service.

### **Asking a New Question**

Points of Light believes it is no longer sufficient to ask how to get more people to serve or volunteer. What we must ask now is how we can remove barriers to entry to service, making it easy for people to get involved.

We must invest in new models. We must find ways to develop transformative partnerships with multiple sectors that meet people where they are, especially incentivizing and removing barriers for more people to get involved.

Most importantly, we must make service relevant. We must find ways for the person who is undertaking the service to feel like they have a voice and a choice, and that they are deeply connected to the work they are doing.

Mandating it may get people involved for a year. But making it relevant, finding ways to support a continuum of opportunities, especially for the up-and-coming digital-first generation, will inspire people to get involved, to lead and lend support to causes they care about, for a lifetime. And that is when we will truly see change.